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Chairman: Mr. Galuška ..... (Czech Republic)

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00-22911 (E)

The meeting was called to order at 10.15 a.m.

Agenda item 111: Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, questions relating to refugees, returnees and displaced persons and humanitarian questions (*continued*) (A/54/12 and Add.1, A/54/91, A/54/98, A/54/99, A/54/285, A/54/286, A/54/414, A/54/469)

1. **Ms. Janjua** (Pakistan) said that the magnitude of the refugee crisis jeopardized the international protection regime as Amnesty International had defined it. It was therefore important that any new arrangements should be based on international solidarity and burden-sharing. Burden-sharing meant the sharing of responsibility not only in the provision of the necessary resources, but also for the refugees themselves. Pakistan, which had demonstrated its commitment to the principles for the protection of refugees by hosting a considerable number of refugees in its territory for almost 20 years, was among the largest "donors" to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). However, the drying up of international assistance for some 1.8 million Afghan refugees in Pakistan had left his country largely on its own to deal with an onerous burden. The mass movement of refugees towards urban areas created economic, social, environmental and legal problems, as well as problems of security.

2. Pakistan was a developing country which could not allow itself to integrate a refugee population similar in size to the population of a medium-sized State Member of the United Nations, and it questioned the validity of the principle of national integration. The international community should continue to assist refugees in Pakistan and monitor the reconstruction of Afghan territory in order to facilitate the return of the refugees.

3. At its most recent session, the Executive Committee of the Programme of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees had called upon UNHCR to mobilize assistance from the international community to address the economic, social and environmental problems posed by large refugee populations in a developing country. He pointed out that the principles set forth in the Convention and Protocol relating to the Status of Refugees should be applied consistently and that countries which had not acceded to those instruments should at least be guided by article 14 of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights, which recognized that everyone had the right to seek and to enjoy asylum in other countries. It was regrettable to note that, when the problem of refugee protection arose, a growing number of States adopted arrangements which gave priority to their national concerns to the detriment of their responsibilities as members of the international community.

4. It would seem essential, as the Executive Committee had stated, to create partnerships between the various agencies concerned with the protection of refugees and development in order to bridge the gap between relief and rehabilitation.

5. **Ms. Aghadjanian** (Armenia) said that the persistence of conflicts and the massive population flows which resulted therefrom made the already significant number of displaced persons a major problem not only for the countries affected, but for the international community as a whole. The global community should take a more proactive and innovative approach to the challenges posed by that new development. The success of humanitarian operations had, indeed, become a prerequisite for peace and stability in the world.

6. While the protection of refugees was primarily the responsibility of the host country, it should be emphasized that very often the host country did not have the economic and social infrastructure to enable it to take care of the new needs resulting from an influx of population.

7. Since 1988, the number of people seeking refuge in Armenia because of the massacres and persecution in Azerbaijan and of people displaced following the shelling of the Armenian frontier by Azerbaijan represented almost 12 per cent of the population of the country. The root cause of those displacements was that, for 70 years, the Armenians in Azerbaijan, including those in the Nagorny Karabakh region, had been largely deprived of the right to preserve their national identity and their culture, language and religion.

8. Since 1988, most of the Armenians living in Azerbaijan had become either refugees or displaced persons. Even those who had contracted mixed marriages had had to flee the country because of the constant threat to their dignity and even their life. Those brutal acts, which in fact represented the first case of ethnic cleansing in post-war Europe, had put an end to the constitutional movement towards self-

determination which had been initiated in the former Autonomous Region of Nagorny Karabakh.

9. Despite a difficult economic situation resulting from the blockade of the main transportation routes by Azerbaijan and the general economic decline following the disintegration of the Soviet Union, the Armenian Government had done its utmost to meet the needs of almost half a million refugees and to integrate them into society, since their return to Azerbaijan had been – and still was – impossible. The situation had been made even more difficult by the 1988 earthquake, from which Armenia still had to recover.

10. The Armenian Government had nevertheless respected its obligations. It had paid compensation to those Azerbaijanis who had left Armenia without having been able to sell their homes, whereas the Armenians who had fled Azerbaijan had not always received compensation. That had jeopardized the implementation of the Programme of Action adopted at the Regional Conference to Address the Problems of Refugees, Displaced Persons, Other Forms of Involuntary Displacement and Returnees in the Countries of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), which both countries had signed.

11. As the High Commissioner indicated in her report (A/54/12), UNHCR assistance was now focused on promoting the naturalization of refugees and the implementation of long-term development activities to help to integrate them into Armenian society. Since the return of the refugees to Azerbaijan was impossible, the Armenian authorities had taken decisive steps to ensure their integration. For instance, the Law on Citizenship gave refugees the right to acquire Armenian citizenship and thus to enjoy full rights in the host country.

12. While the humanitarian and political problems linked to the refugee crises which occurred in various parts of the world were still far from being resolved, it was encouraging to note that more attention was being paid to the question of international cooperation as a means of cultivating global solidarity and the sharing of responsibilities with regard to assistance to displaced persons. At a time of globalization, a concept of solidarity which went beyond the boundaries of a society or a nation, in other words a global solidarity, was perhaps about to see the light of day.

13. Her delegation noted with regret that the erosion of respect for humanitarian law affected not only the protection of refugees, but also the security of the humanitarian personnel working with them, and she wished to express its deepest sympathy to the families of those who had been targeted by violence in recent years. She also thanked the High Commissioner and her staff for their tireless efforts to assist one of the most vulnerable groups of the population in the world today – refugees.

14. **Mr. Rahola** (Observer for the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies) said that, in order to ensure the effective protection of refugees, it was important that humanitarian agencies should play their respective roles to the full, while taking into account the responsibilities of States and the particular mandates of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and UNHCR for refugees. There was a need for closer cooperation between States and donors, on the one hand, and humanitarian agencies, on the other, and between humanitarian agencies themselves. In that connection, the collaboration between UNHCR, non-governmental organizations and the Red Cross on a programme to develop skills and knowledge in relation to the protection of refugees was beginning to bear fruit.

15. At its twenty-seventh Conference, the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement had adopted a plan of action in which, *inter alia*, it asked the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, its member National Societies and ICRC to ensure that their activities on behalf of displaced persons allowed States to fulfil their obligations and supported the host government's efforts to seek durable solutions. Moreover, as a result of its improved internal coordination, the Movement could now ensure that each component played the role assigned to it in the field: ICRC played the leading role in conflict zones and their immediate surroundings, while the National Society of the Red Cross of the country concerned – supported by the International Federation – provided assistance to displaced persons in other parts of the territory.

16. The response to humanitarian crises seemed to be increasingly driven by the media. Because of the extensive media coverage of Kosovo and Chechnya, the international community was in danger of forgetting other crises arising from major population movements elsewhere in the world. The response should be based above all on the real needs of the victims of conflicts.

17. One of the most alarming phenomena of the past decade was the growing insecurity in which members of humanitarian agencies operated, which represented a threat both to the beneficiaries and to the humanitarian aid staff. In view of the deterioration in working conditions – resulting from the changing nature of conflicts, the mix of genuine refugees and armed elements, and the increase in the number of actors in relief operations – the humanitarian agencies must take it upon themselves to provide training for their staff and the volunteers who supported them in order to enhance security in the field. It was also important to ensure that the use of military capabilities for humanitarian purposes did not cause confusion as to the respective roles of political actors, military forces and humanitarian agencies.

18. **Mr. Asomani** (Director of the Laision Office of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees at United Nations Headquarters) expressed the sincere thanks of UNHCR for the many expressions of support addressed to UNHCR in the Committee during the current session; without that support UNHCR would be powerless to fulfil its mandate. He also congratulated Georgia, Kazakhstan and Swaziland on their recent accession to the 1951 Convention and its 1967 Protocol and said he hoped that those accessions would encourage other countries to follow suit.

19. The theme chosen by the Executive Committee of the Programme of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees for its fiftieth session, "strengthening partnerships to ensure protection", had been echoed in several statements during the consideration of agenda item 111. Many examples of partnerships had been referred to and speakers had often called for the enhancement of those partnerships or for more effective coordination. In that context, a clearer definition of the respective tasks would be needed in order to avoid an over-crowded humanitarian space such as that observed in recent emergencies, which represented a very serious threat to the effectiveness of humanitarian operations.

20. The subject of security had also figured prominently among the concerns mentioned in statements – the security of refugees, the security of States facing the destabilizing effects that accompanied large-scale population movements, and the security of humanitarian staff – as had the need for free access to refugees and the need to maintain the civilian and humanitarian character of the refugee camps. In that context, the idea of a "ladder of options" proposed by the High Commissioner had been welcomed by some as a useful idea and UNHCR intended to reflect further on it.

21. Delegations had also frequently emphasized the importance of prevention, as well as that of measures for post-conflict recovery, two strategies that were closely linked. Several had stressed that respect for human rights, in particular the rights of minorities, played an important role in conflict prevention.

22. Many delegations had referred to important regional initiatives (the Programme of Action adopted at the CIS Conference, the various initiatives of the Organization of African Unity, the Stability Pact for South-Eastern Europe) and one delegation had reminded the Committee that it was essential for peace settlements to give due consideration to humanitarian concerns in order to achieve a lasting peace. Several delegations had also shown interest in the Brookings process, which represented a new attempt to bridge the gap between relief and development, and had asked to be kept informed of progress.

23. Apart from the operational challenges which UNHCR was called upon to deal with in various regions of the world (Kosovo*, the former Yugoslavia, East and West Timor, the situation in Liberia, Sierra Leone, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Burundi and Angola and the situation in the North Caucasus region with the approach of winter), another problem was that there were insufficient resources, in terms of both funding and political will, not only for UNHCR to carry out its mandate, but for the implementation of peace agreements and the promotion of rehabilitation and development. Some speakers had emphasized that population displacements in Africa had not been given the same attention as other recent crises. The High Commissioner would continue her efforts to redress that imbalance.

24. While the challenges were formidable, the statements made during the debate gave grounds for hope that the international community would show itself capable of responding to those challenges and of restoring self-confidence, dignity and hope to the refugees.

The meeting rose at 10.50 a.m.